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ABSTRACT

New Rochelle High School's Bicentennial Year exchange with La Rochelle, France, sent 16 students to La Rochelle and brought 27 La Rochelle students to the American school for three weeks. This program provides a typical example of how a total school program is enriched. The students who traveled to La Rochelle and New Rochelle learned through experience--a country's literature, art, language, customs, food, schools, politics, and style. (Author/MLF)

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Curriculum Enrichment Through School-To-School Student Exchanges

Abstract
of
A Speech Presented at the NASSP Convention
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Survival in our world today rests upon the expansion of societies' social and geographical horizons. As educators, one way of developing this broadened perspective in our students is through conducting school-to-school student exchanges.

Modern communications, economic conditions and technology have created a world in which global interdependence is fast becoming a reality. Educational institutions must prepare students to be adept citizens not only of nation-states, but also of the world-state. To cultivate international cooperation and understanding, curriculum experiences should extend students' international perspectives and afford them the opportunity to develop skills essential to world citizenship.

Recent scholarship categorizes the United States as a nation of cultural pluralism. The "melting pot" theory is now viewed as one of our exploded myths. If an educational program is to be considered effective, students must gain knowledge of the pivotal role which ethnicity has played in shaping America. Such an education helps students acquire not only a greater understanding of their own heritage, but also the heritage, culture and experiences of others. It can aid in the development of better inter-group relations. In addition, a multi-cultural education fosters in our students the attitudes, knowledge, and skills that are prerequisites for building a better world for all. To develop this deeper understanding on the part of students, a school's curriculum should reflect the many subcultures within the United States.

Student Exchange Programs not only provide new cultural ventures for individual students and teachers involved, but also expand the dimensions of a school's instructional program. School exchanges present a matchless opportunity to bring to life the examination of a different culture. Through such study, students learn to appreciate, recognize and respect cultural diversity.

New Rochelle High School's Bicentennial Year exchange with La Rochelle, France, sent sixteen New Rochelle students to La Rochelle and brought twenty-seven La Rochelle students to New Rochelle for three weeks. This program provides a typical example of how a total school program is enriched. The students who traveled to La Rochelle and New Rochelle learned through experience-a country's literature, art, language, customs, food, schools, politics, style. It is a marvelous opportunity for students, not only in terms of language education, but also in learning to get along in an entirely different culture. It is perhaps the best way to bring students into contact with a different language and civilization.

After a four-day visit to Paris, the New Rochelle students arrived in La Rochelle where they spent their time attending one of the local high schools, going to parties and dances, sitting in cafes and meeting local residents. As one of the students said upon returning, "I loved it! It made French more than just a classroom subject." This reinforces New Rochelle High School's philosophy supporting such exchange programs. Learning occurs best when not conceived as preparation for life, but when it occurs in the context of actual living.

But, perhaps more significant than the rewards reaped by individual students participating in the exchange are the important and unique contributions the exchange gives to the school's curriculum. The program offers new and exciting forms of educational opportunity for all students.

In order for such an outcome to be realized, much thinking, planning, research and invertion must be done and ultimately coordinated. Like one of those rare astronomical conjunctions, an unusual blend of circumstances needs to exist so that the talent and enthusiasm of various school groups and personnel concentrate on the program.

What originated as an idea proposed by the Language Department chairperson to celebrate the Bicentennial was quickly adopted by students, other departments and staff. They recognized the potential of the exchange program in enriching the school's curriculum.

As a comprehensive high school, New Rochelle has a large and diverse student population. It must develop through its differences. Focusing on the student exchange, gave teachers and students an opportunity to further integrate a study of ethnicity into their curriculum.

Many events were held and activities undertaken to better acquaint students not only with the culture and history of France, but also the many subcultures within the United States so as more effectively to communicate American modes and history to the La Rochelle students. Students conscientiously prepared themselves for the exchange both to give and receive knowledge and understanding.

In Social Studies classes, students devoted themselves to additional research on France so that they could warmly welcome the visitors from La Rochelle and have a basis on which to ask them appropriate questions. Students also prepared special material - exhibits, papers, slide-tape shows - through which to explain aspects of American society, customs, and history to the La Rochelleans.

To raise money to partially defray costs of the exchange program, New Rochelle High School students produced a French cultural evening. Through music, drama, and poetry French culture was brought to life. Such an activity is as entertaining and fruitful for the cast as the performance is for the audience.

The knowledge gained from the work and study completed in preparation for the exchange, was further supplemented by the added resources brought into the school -- La Rochelle students and New Rochelle students recently returned from France. In many classes, presentations were given by individual students participating in the exchange. Through these talks all students share in the international experience and have their geographical and social perspectives broadened. As a result, many preconceived views are modified and changed.

The French visitors joined our students not only in class, but in many co and extra-curricular activities. Whether in school club meetings, athletic events or an International Banquet, the dialog between students was free, open and constant.

To single out these particular instances of how a school-to-school student exchange program enriches the curriculum, in many ways underestimates the total effect of the program. Such exchange programs breed an immeasurable respect for the contributions of all cultures in a way that cannot be achieved solely in the traditional classroom.

New Rochelle High School's curricular emphasis is and has been the universality of experience. The experiences of all groups are important; in important ways the experiences of all groups are the same. As Gordon Allport observed, students should "see each other as variants of a common humanity." If this is a prime educational goal for students, I know of no more purposeful or productive way to achieve this objective than through the experience of student-to-student communication facilitated through a school-to-school exchange program.

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NEW ROCHELLE - LA ROCHELLE EXCHANGE

NEW ROCHELLE HIGH SCHOOL
New Rochelle, New York

BACKGROUND

Although the value of school exchange programs - domestic and foreign - is recognized, many schools are reluctant to become involved. Finances appear to be the major constraint. However, problems with personnel and Board of Education, school and community support do arise and must be faced.

In New Rochelle, a definite interest in cultural exchange has existed. Over the years, individual students have participated in many of the nationally recognized exchange programs. In addition, school clubs and organizations have sponsored foreign study and tours for our students.

Therefore, when our Supervisor of Foreign Languages suggested we initiate as part of our Bicentennial celebration a yearly exchange with our sister city of La Rochelle, France, the idea was warmly received. And, considering our history, it was a most appropriate choice.

New Rochelle, New York was founded 88 years before the United States was officially born. Originally a village of Siwanoy Indians, the site was purchased in 1687 from John Pell by a group of Huguenot refugees fleeing religious persecution in La Rochelle,

France. The deed, signed on September 20, 1689 by Pell and his wife, Rachell, gave six thousand acres of land in return for a payment of 1,625 pounds of sterling and added as a gift, one hundred acres for the French Church. All was with the condition that Pell or his heir be paid "one fat calfe on every fourth and twentieth day of June yearly, and every year forever if demanded." This ceremony is still carried out today with a descendent of John Pell although the calfe is now returned to its owner shortly after the public ritual. Among descendants of John Pell who have participated in recent years, is the Honorable Claiborne Pell, Congressman from Rhode Island.

No one knows for certain just how many persons arrived in that first group but the census ten years later showed 44 families living here. Thirty-nine were French, three were Dutch, one German, and one English. French was the spoken language and many of the old records of the City were written in French.

DEVELOPING THE PROGRAM

To create a school-to-school exchange between New Rochelle and La Rochelle, we contacted the Council on International Educational Exchange. Through CIEE an exchange agreement was formulated with two lycees in La Rochelle. At a cost of $514.00, CIEE provided insurance, round trip air transportation between New York and Paris,

lodging and tours in Paris and round trip ground transportation between Paris and La Rochelle. The exchange schools were responsible for making all other arrangements for visits.

Much planning and inventiveness by various school personnel, clubs and organizations went into the immediate tasks of selecting exchange participants, finding host families, raising money for scholarships for students in need of financial help, and for tours and activities for the La Rochelleans during their visit to New Rochelle.

An exchange committee, chaired by the Supervisor of Foreign Languages and composed of administrators, teachers, parents and other interested citizens established selection criteria for students and host families. Interest, motivation, character, personality, and staff recommendations were considered. Although excellence in French was not a prerequisite, it was necessary for each student to have taken or be taking French III. Once the students and host families were selected, orientation meetings were held to familiarize the students and families with goals, policies and procedures of the exchange experience.

The exchange committee adopted a budget of $5,000.00 to finance activities for the French students during their three week visit and determined about $1,500.00 was needed to assist our students who could not afford to go to France. To secure the funds, the Exchange Committee initiated several projects -- cake and

candy sales, a theatrical production of French music, dance and poetry, solicitation of contributions from individuals and school clubs and organizations. In addition, the Supervisor of Foreign Languages made an appeal to civic and service clubs as well as churches and synagogues.

THE PROGRAM

(OVER THERE)

In February 1976, sixteen New Rochelle High School students and a teacher chaperone departed Kennedy Airport aboard a 747 crowded with over 400 teenagers from approximately ten eastern cities also participating in CIEE arranged exchanges.

After a three-day stay in Paris for sightseeing and tours, our students were off for the five-hour trip to La Rochelle where they were greeted by their French families. Upon arrival in La Rochelle, the Mayor - a recent visitor to our City of New Rochelle - held a formal reception in City Hall attended by local dignitaries and the American Consul stationed in Bordeaux. The welcoming ceremonies included a toast to America with the regional aperitif, Pineaud.

The City of La Rochelle presented each student with a free pass for all public conveyances and free transportation for three

all-day excursions: a visit to Cognac with a tour of two distilleries, a trip to the offshore island of Oleros to see the oyster beds, and an excursion to a goat farm to witness the workings of a dairy. In addition, our students received free guides for the municipal library, city hall, the Prefecture of the region, the Archives of the city and the museum of La Rochelle, where a twenty-minute film of La Rochelle's 18th century homes and gardens was shown.

Not only were our students' social, cultural and geographical horizons broadened, but also they received first hand knowledge of the French school system. Each of our sixteen students was assigned to attend one of the three La Rochelle high schools. (See attached news articles for students' impressions of their exchange experience.)

(HERE)

Arriving at New Rochelle High School on Friday evening, March 19, 1976, twenty-seven La Rochelle students and two teachers were greeted by school officials and host families. A fun, full and productive three week visit had been arranged for our visitors.

After a day of relaxing and getting acquainted with their host families, the La Rochelleans beginning on Sunday morning immersed themselves in the planned activities and programs. After a bus

tour of New Rochelle, they were welcomed at a banquet at the local Sheraton Inn. Among the notables attending were school and local government officials, U.S. Congressman Richard Ottinger and the actor, Ossie Davis.

There was travel to West Point, and to the dedication of the Odell Mansion in Hartsdale, New York, used by George Washington and General Rochambeau as headquarters during the American Revolution. General de Gaulle's son-in-law was present for the ceremony telecast via satellite to France.

The La Rochelleans visited Washington, D.C. and were welcomed at the White House by an aide of President Ford. They also toured New York City, attended the Broadway play, "Shenandoah."

When not traveling or attending the numerous receptions given by school and community groups, our French visitors followed a class schedule worked out on the first day by one of their teacher chaperones. Their school programs were either similar to ones they followed in La Rochelle or to the schedules of their hosts' children.

SUMMARY

New Rochelle High School has a commitment to offering new and outstanding forms of educational opportunity to its students. Our efforts include a reaching out to broaden our students' intellectual

and social perspectives. Such growth emanates from school-to-school student exchange.

School exchange enriches the curriculum in many ways and supplements the learning of students who participate.

Since our exchange involved a French school, one may be inclined to think of enrichment only in relation to French language and culture. However, students participating in an exchange become ambassadors for our country. It is, therefore, necessary for them to be knowledgeable of the concepts upon which our government is based. Furthermore, students need to understand those national concerns that have international implications.

It is our school's special challenge to continue to facilitate these exchange programs. The constraints involved in developing exchange programs can be overcome; the nature and quality of the values received from exchange programs cannot be easily matched.